



Occupational Stress Assessment Manual



<http://www.focusonstress.com>

Disclaimer

This manual is designed to provide information on the use of the Occupational Stress Assessment computer program (OSA). As part of this information, general statements about stress are made and a good faith effort is made to provide information suitable for the general public. If legal or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

It is not the purpose of this manual to reprint all the information that is otherwise available but instead to complement and supplement other sources. You are urged to read all the available material, learn as much as you can about stress, and tailor the information to your individual needs. For more information please see the resources referenced throughout this manual. Every effort has been made to make this manual is complete and as accurate as possible. However there may be mistakes both typographical and in content. Furthermore, this manual contains information on stress and stress management this current on only up to the printing date.

The purpose of this manual is to educate and entertain. It is also designed to inform the potential buyer of the OSA about the possible uses of the program, as well as the limitations of it. The author and publisher shall have neither the liability nor responsibility to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused, or alleged to have been caused, directly or indirectly, by the information contained in this manual.

If you do not wish to be bound by the above, you may delete this free manual from your hard drive. You're under no obligation to purchase and use the OSA.



What is the Occupational Stress Assessment?

The Occupational Stress Assessment (OSA) is an instrument designed to let organizations appraise stress levels of their employees and provide feedback on three levels:

1. The employee's level of stress on a particular scale;
2. Coping tips appropriate for the types and levels of stress experienced by the employee; and
3. Coping Tip Sheets that provide information on how employees can use specific stress management and coping strategies in their daily lives.

This instrument is a psychological instrument developed and normed over a three-year period. Over 1000 persons from all walks of life participated in the development of this instrument during seminars, workshops, and classes. It is presented in this format so that a larger group of persons may be exposed to it, in hopes that they will gain a greater understanding of stress and ways to manage it.

Obtaining a copy of the program

Free copy

You may download a trial version of this program at
<http://www.focusonstress.com/>

You can purchase access codes to upgrade the program on the website. ***It would probably be a good idea to try out the trial version to see if it works on your system.***

Full version

The full version, ready to download and operate (no access codes needed)
<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/B00005QFWQ/>

It would probably be a good idea to uninstall the trial version before installing any of the full versions.

From time to time, you can find the same program available at Amazon for a much lower price on E-Bay. If you check the "about me" page below, you'll see essentially the same program as found on Amazon, but at approximately a 75% discount.

<http://members.ebay.com/aboutme/nutsaboutdisney/>





What is stress?

Stress is an energizing force that stimulates you and increases your level of alertness so that you may respond to the challenges and demands of daily life.

Life without stress would be incredibly dull and boring. Life with too much stress becomes unpleasant and tiring, and may ultimately damage your health or well-being. Too much stress can seriously interfere with your ability to perform effectively. The secret of successful stress management is to stay at a level of stimulation that is healthy and enjoyable.

Most people realize that aspects of their work and lifestyle can cause stress. While this is true, it is also important to note that aspects of your environment can cause it. There are several major sources of stress:

- *Fight or Flight Stress*: When your survival or health is threatened, and you are put under pressure, or experience some unpleasant or challenging event, adrenaline is released in your body and you experience all the symptoms of your body preparing for 'fight or flight'.
- *Internally generated stress*: We actually can make a lot of our own stress. It can come from worrying about events beyond your control, from a tense, hurried approach to life, or from problems caused by your own behavior and cognitive predispositions.
- *Environmental stress*: Parts of your environment can be stressful, such as noise, crowding, pollution, or other distractions.
- *Lifestyle*: Sometimes, stress builds up over a long period when you try to achieve too much in too little time and are not using effective time management strategies.

A basic tenet of effective stress management is that the strategies that you should adopt to manage stress depend on the source of that stress.

Fight or Flight Stress

Where you are in a physically or emotionally threatening situation your body adapts to help it react more effectively to meet the threat. This is controlled mainly by release of adrenaline, which causes a number of changes that help you to survive. The primary changes are:

- It energizes your body: this gives your body access to more strength, energy and stamina. This helps you to fight harder or run faster.
- It reduces the blood supply to your skin and short-term non-essential organs. This minimizes bleeding if you are hurt, and ensures that energy is not wasted on processes that are not immediately useful, like digestion.
- You may experience nausea or diarrhea, which serves the purpose of eliminating excess weight that might otherwise slow you down. This is one reason why long-term stress can be detrimental to your health in the form of digestive disorders like irritable bowel syndrome.

You may have experienced these changes and interpreted them as 'fear'. However, when speed and physical strength are important this stress brought on by adrenaline may be helpful to you. Instead of being something bad, fear can help you to survive or perform better.

On the other hand, where calm thought or precise motor skills are important, it is best to control these adrenaline responses.

Personality and Stress

Your personality can affect the way in which you experience stress. You may be familiar with the idea of 'type A' personalities who thrive on stress, and 'type B' personalities who are mellower and more relaxed in their approach.

Stress can cause the levels of neurotransmitters and hormones to rise, giving a feeling of confidence and elation that type As enjoy. This can cause Type As to defer work until the last minute to create a 'deadline high', or can create a stressful environment at work that feeds their enjoyment of a situation. The downside of this is that leaving jobs until the last minute can lead to failure when something unexpected occurs. This may also lead to unnecessary stress for other colleagues who may not appreciate more stress.

Other aspects of personality lead to stress, especially when you think about the interaction between personality and the situation. For example:

- Introverts placed in public settings are more likely to be stressed out;
- Extroverts who work in solitary settings or on solitary tasks often are stressed by the experience;
- Persons who are dispositionally suited to make decisions may be especially frustrated by policies and procedures that emphasize the importance of extensive planning; or
- Persons who prefer to consider all sides of an issue before making a decision may risk becoming burned out in a fast-paced work setting.

Irrational Beliefs

Many times, stress results when one worries about things that can't be changed. Albert Ellis listed the five main unrealistic desires or beliefs that lead to stress:

- The desire always to have the love and admiration of all people important to you. This is unrealistic because you have no control over other people's thoughts and wishes. It is more effective to be concerned over things you actually can control.
- The desire to be thoroughly competent at all times. The problem is that you can only advance your skills to a new level by trying new things, making mistakes, and learning from mistakes. When you are trying to learn to juggle, for example, the first thing you learn is how to become comfortable with dropping the ball.
- The belief that external factors cause all misfortune. Sometimes, your beliefs – which lead to actions – can cause you to fail. Additionally, when you are in a bad mood, it is easy to attribute neutral events to "bad luck."
- The desire that events should always turn out the way that you want them to, and that people should always do what you want. Sometimes, it is to your advantage to not get your own way: people have a tendency to pleasantly surprise you when you least expect it. Besides, if you think about it, as long as there is even 1 other person in the world, each could not get his/her way 100% of the time. Now, multiply that by 6 billion...
- The belief that past bad experience will inevitably control what will happen in the future. This flies in the face of learning and self-improvement: you can learn from bad experiences and prevent them from happening in the future. Just because you burned

your hand on a stove once does not mean that you should feel compelled to burn your hand each time you approach a stove.

Environmental Stress

You may find that your environment is exacerbating your stress. The stress you experience may come from some of the following:

External environmental stresses

Unpleasant or distracting stimuli can be stressful. Examples of these include:

- Crowding and invasion of personal space
- Insufficient working and living space
- Noise
- Dirty or untidy conditions
- Pollution
- An unsafe environment

Dietary stresses

The foods you eat may contribute to the stresses you experience. Examples include:

- *Caffeine*: this raises your levels of stress hormones, makes it more difficult to sleep, and can make you more irritable.
- *Bursts of sugar from sweets or chocolate*: Although these can make you feel more energetic in the short term, your body can over compensate for high sugar levels by releasing too much insulin, causing an energy dip shortly after the sugar high.

As well as these specific sources of stress, you may experience stress if you eat an unbalanced or unhealthy diet. You may find that some dietary deficiency or excess causes discomfort and illness, which can be stressful. If you are obese, then this causes physical stress on your internal organs and emotional stress as your self-image suffers.

While there is a lot of biased, dubious or incorrect dietary information around, you can normally rely on nutritional advice from your doctor or from your local health department. A good internet site run by a consortium of universities can be found at www.netwellness.org

Occupational stress

Much stress is associated with the social climate at your job. For example, you may have issues with some of the following areas (all of which – and more – are addressed by the OSA):

Empowerment: Empowerment is how much input you have on decisions at work that impact you or the outcomes of your work. Persons with low levels of empowerment in their workplace often face time and deadlines set by other people. Often, a lack of relevant information about a task or disruptions in work plans is symptomatic of low empowerment and lead to stress.

Organizational Irrationality: Organizational Irrationality refers to how frequently things change at work. With high levels of organizational irrationality, you may have to overcome unnecessary obstacles; deal with changes in procedures and policies; have a lack of clear

objectives; or have unclear expectations of your role from your boss or colleagues. The basic disruptive forces with organizational irrationality are interference in your work and a basic lack of job security.

The overall impact is chaos and uncertainty in the workplace, which increases your stress.

Job Complexity: Job Complexity refers to how complicated your job is: how long would it take to train a replacement, how many people depend on you to do your job, or how many other people report to you. You can become stressed if you have too much or too little work to do; if you are pressured into having to perform beyond your experience or perceived abilities; or if you have responsibility for people, budgets or equipment. If a major effort on your part is involved in just keeping up with new developments, this can be very stressful. It is likely that your job may even impact your personal life, if it is overly complex.

Other facets of occupational stress assessed by the OSA include:

- **Ennui:** When lacking a clear plan for career development or lacking opportunity, you can be stressed through boredom;
- **Fast-paced work:** some individuals find that interference in work or setting of the pace by others is stressful;
- **Burnout:** being stuck in the same stressful job, being under-promoted, and dealing with frustration and boredom in your current job leads to stress; and
- **Organizational Cynicism:** dealing with pressures from your boss or from above in your organization and feeling that the organization is exploitative in nature is a sign of organizational cynicism, a harbinger of stress.





Symptoms of stress

While a certain level of stress is necessary to avoid boredom, high levels of stress over a sustained period can damage your health. While the symptoms described below individually may not be a problem, when several appear in combination, it may be attributable to stress.

Short Term Physical Symptoms

These mainly occur as your body adapts to perceived physical threat, and are caused by release of adrenaline. Although you may perceive these as unpleasant and negative, they are signs that your body is ready for "fight or flight":

- Faster heart beat
- Increased sweating
- Cool skin
- Cold hands and feet
- Feelings of nausea, or 'Butterflies in stomach'
- Rapid Breathing
- Tense Muscles
- Dry Mouth
- A desire to urinate
- Diarrhea

These are the symptoms of fight or flight stress.

Short Term Performance Effects

While adrenaline helps you survive in a 'fight-or-flight' situation, it does have negative effects in situations where this is not the case:

- It interferes with clear judgment and makes it difficult to take the time to make good decisions.
- It can seriously reduce your enjoyment of your work
- Where you need good physical skills it gets in the way of fine motor control.
- It causes difficult situations to be seen as a threat, not a challenge.
- It damages the positive frame of mind you need for high quality work by promoting negative thinking, damaging self-confidence, narrowing attention, disrupting focus and concentration and making it difficult to cope with distractions

- It consumes mental energy in distraction, anxiety, frustration and temper. This is energy that should be devoted to the work in hand.

Long Term Physical Symptoms

These occur where your body has been exposed to adrenaline over a long period. One of the ways adrenaline prepares you for action is by diverting resources to the muscles from the areas of the body, which carry out body maintenance. This means that if you are exposed to adrenaline for a sustained period, then your health may start to deteriorate. This may show up in the following ways:

- change in appetite
- frequent colds
- illnesses such as asthma, back pain, digestive problems, and headaches.
- sexual disorders
- aches and pains
- feelings of intense and long-term tiredness

Internal Symptoms of Long Term Stress

When you are under stress or have been tired for a long period of time you may find that you are less able to think clearly and rationally about problems. This can lead to the following internal emotional 'upsets':

- Worry or anxiety
- Confusion, and an inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Feeling ill
- Feeling out of control or overwhelmed by events
- Mood changes, such as depression, frustration, hostility, helplessness, impatience & irritability, and restlessness
- Being more lethargic
- Difficulty sleeping
- Drinking more alcohol and smoking more
- Changing eating habits
- Reduced sex drive
- Relying more on medication

Behavioral Symptoms of Long Term Stress

When you or other people are under pressure, this can show as:

- Talking too fast or too loud

- Yawning
- Fiddling and twitching, nail biting, grinding teeth, drumming fingers, pacing
- Psychological aspects, such as irritability, defensiveness, being critical, aggression, irrationality, and overreaction and reacting emotionally
- Reduced personal effectiveness, such as being unreasonably negative, making less realistic judgments, being unable to concentrate and having difficulty making decisions, being more forgetful, making more mistakes, and being more accident prone.
- Changing work habits
- Increased absenteeism
- Neglecting personal appearance

These symptoms of stress should not be taken in isolation - other factors could cause them. However if you find yourself exhibiting or recognizing a number of them, then it would be worth investigating stress management techniques.





Optimizing Stress

The level of stress under which you operate is important: if you are not under enough stress, then you may find that your performance suffers because you are bored and unmotivated. If you are under too much stress, then you will find that your results suffer as stress related problems interfere with your performance.

It is important that you recognize that you are responsible for your own stress - very often it is a product of the way that you think. Learn to monitor your stress levels, and adjust them up if you need to be more alert, or down if you are feeling too tense. By managing your stress effectively you can significantly improve the quality of your life.

The approach to optimizing stress depends on the sort of stress being experienced:

Short-term stress: If the stress is only temporary, like a difficult meeting, a public performance, or a confrontational situation, then the emphasis of optimizing stress is on short-term management of adrenaline to maximize performance.

The Optimal Arousal Theory, also known as the Yerkes-Dodson Law, states that there is a perfect level of stress that suits the task at hand. When your arousal is low, your performance will suffer because of boredom and difficulty in staying motivated. This level of arousal reflects the concept of Ennui discussed above.



On the other hand, too much arousal can be a detriment to good performance. If you are too stressed out, it may be easier to make mistakes.

The middle of the zone is best for an optimal performance on the job: you are stressed enough to be motivated, but not so stressed out that you will be too nervous to perform well. Please note that the shape of the graph may be different for different people: it is up to you to figure out what is the optimal level for you.

Long term stress: When fatigue and high adrenaline levels over a long period can lead to degraded performance, it is best to optimize stress by managing fatigue, energy, morale, and encouraging healthy habits.

Although some people are harder than others and can keep going under extreme duress, it's a cop-out to use a perceived lack of hardness as an excuse for not pushing yourself hard enough. In real-life, though, most people find that having tasks and challenges increased at a slow rate makes it easy to be pushed to a level where your work, and physical and mental health start to suffer. The strongest and most flexible position is to actively manage your levels of stress and fatigue so that you are able to produce high quality work over a long period, reliably.

High performance in your job may require continued hard work in the face of high levels of sustained stress. If this is the case, it is essential that you learn to pay attention to your feelings. This ensures that you know when to relax, slack off for a short period, get more sleep, or implement stress management strategies. If you do not take feelings of tiredness, upset or discontent seriously, then you may face failure, burnout or breakdown.

As well as paying attention to your own stress levels, it may be worth paying attention to the stress under which people around you operate. If you are a manager seeking to improve productivity, then failing to monitor stress may mean that you drive employees into depression or burnout. If this is a danger, then reduce stress for long enough for them to recover, and then reconsider the pace you are setting.





Managing Stress

The OSA provides two basic types of strategies useful in managing stress:

Those specific to the stressor. These are listed in the reports that can be viewed and printed. The specific coping is directly linked to the level of stress the respondent reported in the instrument.

General. You can print out a list of coping tip sheets that are suitable to be distributed to those who have taken the OSA as well as the general population. The topics of these reports include:

- Prevention and Preparation
- Time Management
- Social Support
- Progressive Muscular Relaxation
- Mental imagery /Meditation/ Hypnosis
- Cognitive reappraisal and reframing
- Distorted Thinking Styles
- Nutrition
- Exercise
- Diversions
- Environment and Personal Space
- Action Plans/Contingencies
- Stress Diaries





How do I get Started with the OSA?

Getting Started with the OSA is fairly straightforward. After installing it on a computer, an icon will appear on your desktop.

If you are administering it to another person, you may need to review the operation of the program, read these help files, and be nearby to answer questions as they arise.

The operation of the program is relatively easy. A menu appears at the top of the screen with a series of fairly standard windows controls, such as the "Help" menu that you activated to bring you here.

Gathering basic information

The program starts on the white screen with yellow boxes

Also note that if you choose File| New Session, you will also be brought to this page.



Follow the instructions on the screen itself, entering identifying information on the screen when prompted. On the first screen, the small yellow box at the bottom has space for information:

Name
Age
Gender
Race
Occupation

Below that is a Start command button that will present the rest of the instrument.

Gathering information about stress

After filling out demographic information on the first screen, you'll find 60 questions that the respondent can answer on subsequent screens. The questions are a series of statements with which a person is expected to indicate their level of agreement (ranging from "Rarely" to "Almost always").

The screenshot shows a Windows application window titled "Occupational Stress Assessment Questions 21-30". The window contains a list of 30 statements, each followed by a dropdown menu with the option "Most of the time" selected. The statements are numbered 21 through 30. At the bottom of the window, there is a yellow bar labeled "Navigation" containing two buttons: "Final questions" and "Continue".

Statement	Response
21. I stay late at work (or take my time going home) so I don't have to face stressful events at home.	Most of the time
22. I think of doing something (or have actually done something) to "get back" at my boss or co-workers for things they have said or done.	Most of the time
23. When I make plans, I don't give myself enough time to get things done by the deadline without rushing at the end.	Most of the time
24. I exercise on a regular basis.	Most of the time
25. My job is stifling my personal creativity.	Most of the time
26. The policies and procedures at work help me to do my job in an efficient manner.	Most of the time
27. I am continually racing against deadlines at work.	Most of the time
28. My co-workers are not the kind of people I would socialize with outside work.	Most of the time
29. When I need to "blow off steam" about work, I have someone in whom I can confide.	Most of the time
30. When I get upset at work, I tend to take it out later on the first available target.	Most of the time

Depending on a person's reading speed and comprehension, this portion of the program should take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The questions have been analyzed for readability on the following measures:

Flesch Reading Ease: 69.0

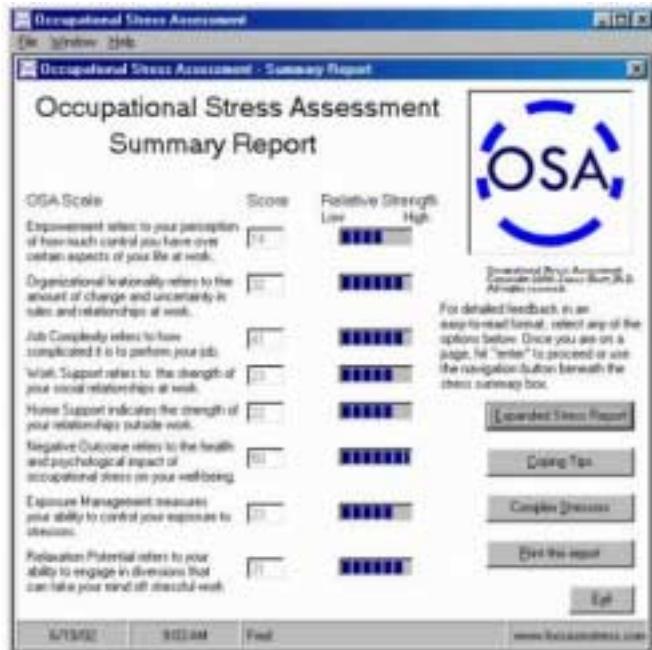
Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 7.2

At the end of the 60 questions, the level of occupational stress experienced by the respondent is calculated. A form is displayed with summary information, calculated from the answers the respondent gave to the 60 items.

Reporting stress

The summary form that appears after the final question is answered has a graphical representation of the strength of an OSA scale, as well as a raw score and descriptor.

If all the questions are not answered, this form will not appear: the respondent will be taken back to the questions instead.



In addition, control buttons are linked to more detailed reports that one can view on the screen: an explanation of the major stressors, tips for coping, and a series of reports on complex stressors (i.e. combinations of major stressors).

The functions controlled by these buttons are also available on the menu, under the “Window” pull-down menu.

This summary form also appears when you open an existing file that you previously saved.

The detailed reports are available in 2 formats:

First, detailed reports are available on-screen in an easy-to read format.

Second, a text-only version (with even more detail) is available for printing.



Printing

There are several options available for printing.

By choosing Print from the File menu, you will be taken to a dialog screen that will present you with several options.

First, you can print a text report. This option is recommended because it provides you with useful information on stress and coping tips in a concise, detailed 8 page report.

Second, you can print the screens for stress, coping, complex stressors, or all three. This will give you less detail but will give you more control over which specific portions of the report you can print. Also, remember: These are optimized for viewing on-screen, so some printers may not be able to print all the data as faithfully as the text report.

Third, you may also print additional general coping tip sheets, each focusing on a particular aspect of stress management.





Getting Help

Technical Support

For technical support, you may contact the instrument's author:

e-mail: shortgj@focusonstress.com
web : <http://www.focusonstress.com/>

Privacy Notice

This instrument asks for responses to questions that some respondents may find intrusive. If you will check the Normative Data section, you will find that most of the questions are strongly related to the scale scores – that is, these questions are essential to calculating the scale scores.

In order to resolve the difficulty posed by the intrusiveness and need to ask the questions, a solution was developed: after the summary scores are calculated and one starts looking at the stress reports, the individual responses to the questions are erased/unloaded from the computer's memory.

When the user of the program invokes the "Save" function, only the summary scores and demographic information are saved. This is designed to maintain the respondent's privacy, as well as increase the efficiency of the save function. When opening a previously saved session, only the 20 pieces of information contained in the saved file (the 5 demographic responses and the 15 scale scores) are needed to reconstitute the stress scores and coping tips.





Affiliate Program

<http://www.focusonstress.com/Affiliate.htm>

Would you like to become an affiliate in a program that pays a 50% commission, netting you almost \$40 per sale? Would you like a proven product that is one-of-a-kind (i.e. no competing products at this point in time)? Would you like to be able to undercut the price of the product as it is currently being offered on [Amazon.com](#) ?

Could you use an extra source of income with great potential for growth?

If you answered "yes", then read on!

The Need

Organizations of all types face challenges with an increasingly diverse workforce and a tight labor market. One of the greatest obstacles to retaining valued employees are quality-of-work-life issues, such as addressing occupational stress, a defining issue in employee satisfaction and subsequent retention. There is a pressing need to manage stress and keep employees happy.

The Solution

Although it would be nice to have a stress expert on call, most organizations cannot afford to pay expensive retainers. The solution? A "stress expert in a box"! The Occupational Stress Assessment (OSA) is an interactive computer-based version of an instrument designed to let organizations appraise stress levels of their employees and provide feedback to them in the form of a stress and coping tips report customized to an individual's needs. Considering the wealth of reports generated by the program, the OSA's registration fee is a smart investment, especially when compared to a consultant's retainer fees.

There is nothing out there like the OSA – for now. It was developed by a researcher who could not find an instrument to measure work stress adequately – so he got to work and developed a very robust instrument, which was later turned into the self-administering, self scoring OSA.

The Money

We are creating an affiliate sales network where persons and their web sites can earn a 50% commission (almost \$40) on each sale by advertising our program, following the guidelines below. It's a pretty good deal for you, since the group that does the affiliate program handles all the billing and code delivery, while Focusonstress.com will "eat" the transaction fees and handle customer service. All you have to do is "beat the bushes" and get people to download.

The OSA computer program is available for [download](#) in shareware version: people can try it out for free and when they see the value of the program, they can go to a website to purchase a registration key which expands the usefulness of the program.

Over the past few years, the "conversion rate" of people who download and then purchase access codes has been a respectable 1-3%.

You could earn some good revenue by becoming one of our affiliates. At almost \$40/sale, the money can add up fast ! Considering that the target audience is approximately 14 million US businesses, and that this is a unique, one-of-a kind product, your income is only limited by your efforts! And if you have access to a mailing list or have a membership on one of Yahoo's Groups on business, you could boost your earnings even more! The more people download, the more you can make!

You can point potential customers to the product on Amazon.com , where it is on sale for \$99. You can use this information to a) enhance your credibility and b) as a selling point - you can offer it for a savings of \$20!

The Details

Basically the way it works is you tell your visitors about our program through shareware software, and banner, button or text links, and the SellShareware Affiliate Management system keeps track of the users you send, and when they buy, you get paid.

If you are interested in trying it or getting more info, please take a look at <http://www.sellshareware.com> to read more and

visit <http://sellshareware.com/SignUp.asp?VendorID=17349> to sign up as an affiliate. (Free signup, plus they handle all the billing and delivery).

After signing up as an affiliate, visit

<http://www.sellshareware.com/AffiliateProgramPage.asp?ProgramID=34512>

to get the required images and links to advertise the Occupational Stress Assessment.

You can preview the banner ads available for your site by clicking below:

[Banner 1](#)

[Banner 2](#)

[Banner 3](#)

[Banner 4](#)

Another option: Go to yahoo.com and look under "Groups" for business related groups. Join a few of the larger ones and make postings with your sellshareware.com links in them.

